

A great game

MacLean's equaliser shakes Wycombe free from that

GOALS SPECTACULAR AS T SAINTS ARE SHOT DOWN IN FLAMES

Wycombe Wanderers 3,
St. Albans City 2

WYCOMBE Wanderers shot their St. Albans bogy down in flames during an aerial dogfight over the City's penalty area at Loakes Park on Tuesday evening.

One down and reeling as usual under the Saints' quick-built attacks, the Blues boldly reversed the situation by pumping high balls deep and often into the visiting defence — a tactic which paid spectacular dividends via three of the finest goals scored in any Isthmian League fixture this season.

It also compensated the severe midfield deficiency St. Albans could have exploited as ruthlessly as they had done twice the previous season, when winning 3-0 in the League at Clarence Park, and again 2-0 in the Amateur Cup at Wycombe.

ALARMING

Both were alarmingly decisive victories engineered from no man's land and emphasised by Wanderers' inability to shackle City's elusive forward pack.

On Tuesday, St. Albans lined up without their lethal duo, Bobby Childs (injured) and John Butterfield (playing for the F.A. at Southall). But there was still the speed and initiative of John Oxley and Tony Turley combining with centre-forward Paul Collett and newly signed ex-Cheshunt striker, Les Picking to challenge Wycombe's backs.

While Paul Fuschillo accompanied Butterfield at Southall, Keith Blunt returned

in his early season spot at right back, while an ankle injury to John Hutchinson switched Geoff Anthony to the left and Tony Horseman filled the number seven shirt.

Neither wingman — Anthony in particular — played themselves into the game, and the Welshman was eventually pulled off in favour of big Les Hartridge, making a welcome return to Isthmian football for the final 14 minutes.

FURIOUS

It was fast and furious from the word "go". Kevin O'Brien pulled off the first in a series of cat-like saves by tipping Oxley's powerful header over the crossbar from a corner within 60 seconds.

Wanderers sorely missed the elusive Hutchinson in early attempts to play the visitors at their own game. And it was with the run of play that Saints went one up after 19 minutes.

Picking schemed the breakthrough, passing to Roberts, who set Turley up for a shot which sliced the home backs, and punished their poor covering.

The process to which Wanderers succumbed last season seemed to be repeating itself yet again. But they fought like the prospective champions they are to avoid another disaster.

To the fore on the night was Bremer, the striker played out of position as a linkman ever since quitting Wealdstone for Wycombe in pre-season. Now he stayed upfield almost exclusively in a forward role, and showed that that's how it should be, scoring twice.

A 24th minute Bremer free kick stretched Bloxham, and within seconds White went dangerously close to heading an own goal to concede City's first corner, as Wycombe steam-rolled their way back into the reckoning.

Two minutes later, John Delaney saw his header pulled off the line by Oxley, temporarily forced to abandon his attacking guise.

Larry Pritchard slammed his first attempt at a shot high, but it was O'Brien's turn again in the 30th minute to cover a power-packed Turley shot.

Nothing could compare however to MacLean's superlative 33rd minute bullet-drive, from all of 35 yards off the left flank. Instead of pushing the danger for a corner, Bloxham unwisely tried to hold

it, and mishandled into goal. The equaliser came from nowhere following a long clearance by Dave Neville, City's skipper.

SCYTHING

A scything move between Blunt and Bremer put Wycombe into the lead five minutes later, and fully exposed the visitors' covering for what it was — shoddy. But again it presented a magnificent spectacle, the full-back belting a cross over from the right-wing for an unmarked Bremer to split Saints with his well-placed header.

Twice more, before the interval, Bremer shook City, forcing White into heading straight at his own keeper and powering another shot skyward.

St. Albans moved into an immediate attack from the resumption, and only quick action by O'Brien and Turley's dithering saved an equaliser.

Yet a minute later, White inched close to an own goal for a third time in conceding a corner, and after 52 minutes Wanderers' slow build up from a Blunt free kick saw Saints in trouble again as Bremer tried to finish off.

There were scoring chances scorned by Bremer and the over-quiet Keith Searle in turn before Bernie met Pritchard's 60th minute cross for another headed goal — and another great one!

WHITE'S IRONY

Ironically the edgy White turned hero for St. Albans nine minutes later, when booting the ball under O'Brien's body as the ball found him positioned by the far post from a free kick.

The goal — basically a defensive error, enhanced by O'Brien — threw the match into turmoil. Collett, who like Searle was overshadowed by events of the night, tried for an equaliser, and inevitably Bremer continued his shoot-on-sight tactics.

While Hartridge took over from Anthony, St. Albans tried their ace card by pulling off Picking in favour of defender Mike Pardey to allow giant-sized full-back Les Burgess to move up front for the final ten minutes.

But the switch had minimal effect on Tuesday. Indeed, despite efforts by both sides to throw the game away — MacLean passing back in suicidal fashion with Roberts on his tail, and Grant shooting wildly towards his own net — the scoreline remained static until the final whistle. M.W.

WYCOMBE WANDERERS: K. O'Brien, K. Blunt, L. MacLean, E. Powell, J. Delaney, B. Baker, A. Horseman, L. Pritchard, K. Searle, B. Bremer, G. Anthony. Sub: L. Hartridge, 76th min.

ST. ALBANS CITY: R. Bloxham, R. Grant, L. Burgess, P. Wood, P. White, D. Neville, J. Oxley, P. Roberts, P. Collett, L. Picking (sub: M. Pardey, 79th min.), A. Turley. Referee: Mr. K. A. Duff (West Molesey).

Attendance: Approx. 3,500.

Match details: (Wycombe figures first) — Shots (on-target) on goal 11-5.